Congresswoman Stephanie Murphy
Keynote Address
"South Korea-United States Strategic Forum: Now and the Future of the ROK-US Alliance"
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Thank you.

Thank you to CSIS and The Korea Foundation for inviting me to speak. I am truly honored to be here. Given recent events on the Korean Peninsula, this event could not be more timely.

Victor, thank you for that warm introduction. In addition to serving as a senior advisor at CSIS, Victor is the director of Asian Studies at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service—where I received my Master's degree. Victor is a terrific teacher and an even better public servant, and I hope his distinguished career in government will soon contain another chapter. I also hope Professor Cha is not grading my performance today and, if he is, I hope I do better than a B-plus, which was my average GPA back in graduate school.

For the benefit of the audience here and online, let me briefly re-introduce myself. My name is Stephanie Murphy and I am a first-year member of Congress. I was born in Vietnam, and came to the United States as a refugee with my family several years after the fall of Saigon in 1975. I am honored to represent a district in central Florida that includes Orlando. I am a member of the House Armed Services Committee, where I serve on the Subcommittee on Readiness and the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.

In addition, along with Congressman Seth Moulton of Massachusetts and Congressman Jimmy Panetta of California, I serve as one of the three co-chairs of the House Democratic Caucus' National Security Task Force.

The purpose of this recently-established Task Force is to help Democrats in Congress propose strong, smart, and strategic national security policies, to support the current administration when it advances foreign policies that comport with our nation's core interests and values, and to vigorously oppose the administration when it pursues policies that undermine those interests and values. As leaders of the Task Force, we see no more benefit in reflexively opposing the administration than we would in blindly supporting the administration.

Before coming to Congress, I worked in various roles as a civilian employee at the Department of Defense, where my primary region of focus was the Asia-Pacific. Although I identify as a

moderate Democrat in Congress, at DOD I staffed two Secretaries of Defense appointed by a Republican President——Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates.

I am a firm, almost fanatical, believer in the old-fashioned maxim that, to the greatest extent possible, politics should stop at the water's edge. Despite the partisan divide in Washington, I continue to cling to this principle—with a sense of determination and, at this point, desperation.

In my brief framing remarks, I would like to underscore the importance of the alliance between the United States and South Korea, to identify what I believe are the two main challenges to this alliance, and to offer some personal views from my vantage point in Congress regarding how these challenges can best be addressed.

Let me begin with a few words about the alliance itself. It has become something of a cliché for government officials to assert that the relationship between two nations is built on common interests and common values. In the case of the U.S. and South Korea, this statement—however trite it may sound—is true.

But, of course, it goes well beyond that. This alliance is special because it was built in battle, forged in fire, and shaped by shared sacrifice. Between 1950 and 1953, the citizens of South Korea and the citizens of the United States fought and often fell side-by-side to repel North Korea's invasion of South Korea and to preserve young South Korea's very existence. In 1953, following the armistice, our two nations signed a mutual defense treaty that commits each country to come to the other's defense if attacked.

In the decades since, South Korea has evolved from dictatorship to democracy, from a largely under-developed country to an economic powerhouse. The U.S. has consistently been there to lend a helping hand, through the provision of economic and security support, and there are currently 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea to help defend our ally. But make no mistake: South Korea's success over the years is attributable, first and foremost, to the talent, ingenuity, and grit of the South Korean people and their leaders. Put differently, South Korea's remarkable rise, like so many consumer products the world has come to depend on, was made in South Korea.

Because our two nations fought together in a war that has never really ended, and because our service members continue to stand watch together along perhaps the most dangerous border in the world, our relationship is the furthest thing from transactional, temporary, or tactical. Instead, it is authentic, deeply personal, and resilient—likely to endure despite the occasional setbacks, tensions, and differences of opinion that are inevitable in any partnership between proud, sovereign and democratic nations.

At the same time, a warning is in order. The proven depth and durability of our security and economic relationship should not breed complacency. A strong alliance, like a strong marriage, is not self-sustaining. It requires patient and persistent upkeep by officials in both nations. It should never—ever—be taken for granted.

Let me turn now to identify what I see as the two broad challenges to the U.S.-South Korea alliance, and to outline a few thoughts on how each challenge should be confronted to maximize the chance of a successful outcome.

The first, and most obvious, challenge is the one posed by the increasingly belligerent, unpredictable and dangerous regime in North Korea—the alliance's original *raison d'être*.

As everyone in this room knows painfully well, North Korea has now conducted six nuclear tests since October 2006, each one a violation of international law. The first two tests were conducted under Kim Jong-il, and the last four tests were conducted under his son, the current leader Kim Jong-un. This past weekend, North Korea carried out its latest detonation of a nuclear device, one that appears to have a vastly more powerful yield than the device it tested back in September 2016.

This is a profoundly dangerous, defiant, and destabilizing event. As expected, the test has generated verbal condemnation from the international community, including China and Russia. But it is too early to say whether these strong words will be followed by strong actions and, if so, what those actions will entail—and whether they will make any difference in altering North Korea's strategic calculus.

Meanwhile, North Korea continues to develop and test missile delivery systems of increasing range and sophistication, having already conducted approximately 16 separate tests this year alone. Tests conducted in July led the U.N. Security Council, including China and Russia, to vote unanimously to tighten existing sanctions and to impose strict new sanctions on Pyongyang, which is certainly cause for cautious optimism.

However, it remains to be seen whether these new sanctions will be adequately enforced, especially by Beijing, who accounts for upwards of 85 percent of North Korea's international trade. It also remains to be seen whether the Security Council will agree to strengthen these sanctions even further in light of North Korea's latest nuclear test. More generally, it is unclear what precise impact sanctions will have on North Korea's economy and on the regime's inclination, if any, to negotiate a nuclear freeze or reversal in exchange for some degree of sanctions relief.

In the short-term, North Korea responded to the new sanctions in its typical fashion, firing a missile last month that flew over Japan, further contributing to the anti-pacifist trend underway in that country. And, of course, North Korea proceeded with its latest nuclear test in the face of broad international opposition. The reality is that we are now in truly uncharted territory here, and we have not yet cracked the code on how to influence decision-making in Pyongyang.

North Korea's evident goal is to develop an arsenal of nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles that can reliably hit the U.S. territory of Guam, the U.S. state of Hawaii, and eventually the U.S. mainland.

According to conventional wisdom, Kim Jong-un's primary reason for pursuing this capability is to avoid the fate that befell leaders like Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, to deter invasion by outside forces, and therefore to ensure regime survival. This rationale naturally bewilders policymakers in the United States and other like-minded countries. We may detest the regime in Pyongyang, but we regard North Korea's relentless progress on its nuclear

and missile programs as the *sole* behavior that could compel the international community to take action that would result in regime change or collapse in North Korea.

From this perspective, North Korea seems to be making a fundamental miscalculation regarding what is in its own best interests, and its provocative conduct could bring about the exact result—regime extinction—that Pyongyang seeks above all to avoid.

This is the conundrum that lies at the heart of the debate over what to do about North Korea: how do we get Kim Jong-un to conclude that a negotiation leading to denuclearization is the best, and indeed the only, way to ensure his regime—however awful—can continue in power?

As Victor has argued, North Korea has another, less obvious goal in pursuing nuclear missiles capable of reaching the United States, which is to weaken the U.S.-South Korea alliance that we are meeting to discuss today. Specifically, Victor asserts that North Korea seeks to threaten the U.S. homeland in order to undercut the credibility of the United States' extended deterrence guarantee to South Korea under our so-called "nuclear umbrella." I agree with Victor's analysis. Kim Jong-un may well believe that his actions could cause U.S. policymakers to act in a more unilateral fashion, undermining the alliance. Kim may even believe that the U.S. would hesitate to come to South Korea's defense if the U.S. perceives that doing so could expose the U.S. to direct attack.

Again, however, I believe Kim is making a fundamental miscalculation. If anything, the increasing threat to the U.S. homeland posed by North Korea should bring the United States and South Korea closer together, not drive a wedge between us—because our fates are so closely intertwined. U.S. policymakers must make crystal clear that the U.S. commitment to South Korea, and the importance that Washington attaches to cooperation with Seoul, is stronger than ever. As Victor and Jake Sullivan noted in a recent op-ed, North Korea is "the land of lousy options." But those options only become worse if there is any real or perceived erosion in the U.S.-South Korea relationship.

That leads me to what I see as the second main challenge to the alliance, which is the changing and complex political dynamics in Washington and Seoul, with the recent elections of President Trump and President Moon.

Let me focus on the former. I think it is safe to say that we have a significantly unconventional leader in the White House. When it comes to the Trump administration and its approach to the multi-faceted U.S.-South Korea partnership, my concerns fall into two categories.

First, I am concerned about the apparent inability of the administration to nominate and secure Senate confirmation of qualified individuals to fill positions at State and Defense responsible for policy toward the Korean Peninsula and East Asia. For example, nearly eight months into this administration:

- There is no nominated U.S. ambassador to Seoul.

- There is no nominated Assistant Secretary in the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

- There is no Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security.

- There is no Special Envoy for North Korean Human Rights Issues.

- Over at the Department of Defense, no individual has been nominated and confirmed for the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, or Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia.

I mean absolutely no disrespect to the individuals who may be holding these positions on an interim or acting basis; some of them are excellent. But we all know that Senate confirmation provides enhanced credibility and stability.

When it comes to international affairs in general and alliance preservation in particular, personnel *is* policy. I am heartened that irresponsible individuals like Steve Bannon and Sebastian Gorka have departed the administration, and that experienced national security professionals like White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster seem to be gaining in influence.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that you need subject-matter experts in place at every level of the national security bureaucracy to develop and execute policy, to reassure allies, and to deter adversaries. The administration has been severely lacking in this respect.

My second concern about the Trump administration is this. Too many members of the administration, including the President himself, do not appreciate that the rhetoric they use and the actions they take to appeal to certain domestic political constituencies can harm relationships with key foreign allies and therefore undermine our nation's security.

Consider, for example, President Trump's initial reaction—via Twitter—to North Korea's most recent nuclear test. If there were any event whose gravity called for a thoughtful, deliberate, sober-minded response not limited to 140-characters, this was it. Unfortunately, the President turned yet again to social media.

Even more troubling than the medium through which he chose to deliver his message was the message itself. The President accused South Korea under President Moon of "appeasement"—evoking the historical memory of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's failed effort to stop German aggression by agreeing to Hitler's demands. Use of such a loaded term may play well with a certain segment of the President's domestic base. But it is hard to overstate just how false, how foolish, and how potentially damaging the President's claim is. Here we are—facing an unprecedented threat of military escalation by a rogue nuclear state, and the leader of the most powerful nation on earth chooses to Twitter shame and Twitter inflame our close ally. If one of North Korea's goals is to test the U.S.-South Korea alliance, as I believe it is, then Pyongyang must be positively gleeful over this tweet.

I am also worried by reports that the Trump administration, again with an eye to pleasing a domestic political audience, could announce that it intends to withdraw from KORUS-FTA. This agreement was initiated and signed under the Bush 43 administration, and was modified, finalized, and approved by Congress with bipartisan support under the Obama administration.

The United States and South Korea are major economic partners. The United States is South Korea's second-largest trading partner, after China, and South Korea is the United States' seventh-largest trading partner. The KORUS-FTA is the centerpiece of this important economic relationship.

My purpose here is not to defend every clause in the KORUS-FTA, although I do believe it is—on net—a beneficial agreement for both countries. Instead, I want to emphasize that both President Bush and President Obama saw the KORUS-FTA as more than simply a trade deal. They also correctly viewed it as a vehicle to deepen and expand influence with a vital ally in a key region. China, notably, has an FTA with South Korea. For this and many other reasons, U.S. policymakers should want our economy and South Korea's economy to be tied *more* closely together, not less.

Against this backdrop, a unilateral decision by the United States to withdraw from the agreement, even if it is a tactical ploy to renegotiate aspects of the agreement, is likely to be seen by South Korea as a betrayal of America's commitment to the broader alliance at a precarious time. If the United States cannot be trusted to do business with South Korea on the basis of a mutual agreement negotiated by two U.S. presidents of both political parties, why should South Korea believe our security assurances are real? I hope the Trump administration is asking itself hard questions like this, and that it will proceed with wisdom and care—two characteristics that have been in short supply thus far in this administration.

Let me close with a thought about the importance of U.S. leadership, and the role of Congress in ensuring that our country does not retreat from its global responsibilities in an age of rising populism.

I understand why calls to put "America first" can resonate with hard-working families throughout the United States who are struggling here at home and who sincerely wonder why our country is spending precious taxpayer dollars on defense, diplomacy, and development abroad.

At the same time, I firmly believe that the United States is safer, stronger and more prosperous when our service members, our diplomats, our trade officials, and our aid workers are sufficiently numbered, adequately resourced and deeply engaged. The world is a better place when we work side-by-side with our partners in Asia and other regions, both to prevent conflict and to prepare ourselves to prevail should conflict occur.

I have a personal story that underscores how strongly I support the principle that U.S. and global security flow from, and depend on, U.S. global leadership and engagement. Recently, my six-year-old son was visiting Washington, DC from Orlando with a number of his classmates and their parents. I escorted them to the World War II Memorial, which prompted one of my son's more pensive friends to turn to me and ask: "Ms. Stephanie, how come there hasn't been a World War III?"

I gave what I believe to be a truthful—although perhaps not age-appropriate—response. I told him I thought there were two main reasons why we have not experienced direct and devastating conflict between major powers in the last 60 years. The first is U.S. leadership around the world. The second is the web of institutions and alliances that the United States and its partners in Asia and Europe established after World War II.

Rest assured: If this child grows up to be the general or admiral in charge of U.S. Pacific Command, I intend to claim credit.

My experience on Capitol Hill has led me to believe that there is strong bipartisan recognition in Congress that U.S. global leadership, engagement, and alliances *matter*—and matter a great deal. Which is good because I am also of the view that Congress, as a co-equal branch of government and the one with the primary power of the purse, should not be timid about exercising its considerable authority when it comes to foreign policy. We should use the power conferred upon us by Article I of the Constitution, and wield it in a way that is consistent with our longstanding national interests and values, ideally with the approval of the executive branch, but over its objections if necessary. If Congress sees the Trump administration take any step that would weaken our alliance with South Korea, Congress should step in.

I will end here. Thank you again for the invitation, and I look forward to answering your questions.